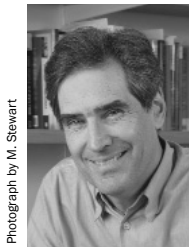


DR. MICHAEL IGNATIEFF



Photograph by M. Stewart

An internationally recognized and award-winning writer, scholar, and broadcaster, Dr. Michael Ignatieff was recently named Professor and Director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Over the previous two years, he served as a member of the Independent International Commission on Kosovo (chaired by Justice Richard Goldstone) and the Independent International Commission on Sovereignty and Intervention.

Two of his most recent books have focused on ethics and war: *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (1995) and *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (2000). He has also written the authorized biography of philosopher Isaiah Berlin, two novels, numerous scholarly works, several screenplays, and major articles in *Foreign Affairs*, *The New York Review of Books*, and *The New Yorker*. In addition, he has been the writer and presenter of major television documentaries on ethnic nationalism ("Blood and Belonging"), the United Nations ("Guardians of Chaos"), the South African Truth Commission Amnesty Hearings ("Getting Away with Murder"), the fall of the Berlin Wall ("One World?"), and "Future War." His career in journalism included positions at the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, *The Observer*, *Time*, and BBC Television.

Michael Ignatieff holds a BA in history with first-class honors from the University of Toronto, a Ph.D. in history from Harvard University, and an MA from Cambridge University. He has been a recipient of the Lionel Gelber Prize for Writing on Foreign Affairs, the Cornelius Ryan Award of the Overseas Press Club in New York, the Alastair Home Fellowship at St. Anthony's College, Oxford, and a MacArthur Foundation Grant. Over the past five years, he has held special lectureships at the University of Notre Dame, the University of California at Berkeley, the London School of Economics, Brandeis University, and Princeton University.

VIRTUAL WAR: ETHICAL CHALLENGES

Welcome from Dr. Albert C. Pierce, Director, Center for the
Study of Professional Military Ethics

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Introduction by VADM John R. Ryan, Superintendent,
U.S. Naval Academy

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Lecture by Dr. Michael Ignatieff, Professor and Director of the
Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Kennedy School of
Government, Harvard University

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Questions and Answers

This is an edited, abridged version of the original lecture transcript.

WELCOME

Dr. Pierce

Good evening and welcome, one and all, to the third event in the ethics lecture series, which is sponsored by the Center for the Study of Professional Military Ethics. I'm Al Pierce, the Director of that Center. We hope these lectures make a substantial contribution to what the Center has identified as its first major program goal: to enrich the intellectual life of the Naval Academy in the field of ethics. These lectures, of course, are open to the entire Naval Academy community and to the public, but we choose the topics and the lecturers to enrich the learning of the midshipmen in our core ethics course NE203, and I take special note of the presence of those midshipmen here this evening.

Two years ago, we inaugurated this series with a lecture on moral courage in public life by Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska. Last year's event we entitled, "Moral Courage: An Evening in Honor of Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale." This year, we chose to shift away from moral courage and the characteristics of the moral leader to a different topic: the ethics of how we commit and use military force overseas. It's an important topic in NE203, and it's an important topic for all of us, whether as military professionals or as citizens.

We gather in this beautiful building named in honor of the father of modern naval strategy, Alfred Thayer Mahan. To apply a 21st-century term to that 19th-century figure, Mahan was a cutting-edge thinker of his day, and this evening's speaker, Dr. Michael Ignatieff, is truly a cutting-edge thinker in the field of ethics and warfare in the 21st century. To say more about that, it's now my pleasure to introduce the 56th superintendent of the U.S. Naval Academy, Vice Admiral John Ryan.

INTRODUCTION

Admiral Ryan

Well, good evening. Our speaker tonight brings a rich background to the discussion of ethics and virtual war. You have his biography in your program, and I know that you have all read that, so I will not repeat the information again here tonight, but I do want to highlight a couple of points about Dr. Ignatieff.

He combines the skills and experiences of both the professional journalist and the professional historian. Those of you who have read his books and articles have seen evidence of both. He writes from the bottom up, not from the top down. That is, he has spent a considerable amount of time on the ground in places like Bosnia, Kosovo, and other trouble spots, talking with the local inhabitants, the local combatants, relief workers, and military peacekeepers. Many of you will do that after your graduation, as military officers, international diplomats, and policy-makers. Dr. Ignatieff has the journalist's eye for detail and the journalist's instincts to get people to tell their own stories, yet he brings the historian's perspective to bear as he writes, wrapping today's details in a much broader context.

I know from speaking with him that he is especially interested in hearing the reactions and questions of those of you here tonight. Please join me in a warm Naval Academy welcome for Dr. Michael Ignatieff.

LECTURE

Dr. Ignatieff

Thank you very much. It's a great honor to be here. It's a great honor to speak in this room. I might as well be frank with you. This Canadian civilian is a little nervous, but it means a great deal to me and my wife to be invited to talk to you. I want to repeat something that Vice Admiral Ryan said. There are microphones here, and I hope afterwards when I have sufficiently infuriated you and provoked you, you'll stand up and take me on.

My subject is "Virtual War: Ethical Challenges," and I want to do it back to front. I want to start with the ethical challenges before I've even defined what I mean by virtual war, so let me start with ethical challenges and just say something in general about the importance of ethics in your education as young military officers. One of the things that strikes me is that you are in a profession where ethics is not, repeat not, an optional extra. It is the absolute core of what defines you as a warrior profession. It is ethical restraint that makes the distinction between a warrior and a barbarian, right? There are very few professions in which ethical discrimination is more at the core of what you do than your own. You are charged to live and sometimes die by a code of what I have called in a book of mine "the warrior's honor," and the core of a warrior's honor is obedience to a very stringent ethical code of restraint. Your teachers have taught you what it is, and you know what it is, and you live your life by it. The basic elements are: to use the least amount of violence necessary to accomplish a given objective, that is, to live by the rule of economy of force; and to fight only for causes that are just, under orders that are given to you by your civilian commanders.

You live in a democracy. You live under the obedience to civilian control of the military. When you conduct military operations, simple, basic ethical rules are at the core of what you do. You never fire on civilians. You never fire on a retreating enemy. You treat enemy prisoners and wounded as you would your own. You never use force except in pursuance of a legal order. I have not been systematic about what it is to have a code of warrior's honor. I've simply isolated a few of the key elements, but all of

them are fundamentally ethical. It is what keeps you what you are, and that's why your life is one continuous set of ethical challenges. Being fine military officers requires you to live by the highest ethical standards, and as a civilian, it is what I admire and respect about military personnel.

Now let's talk a little bit about what I mean by virtual war. I want to talk about it in two senses. We use "virtual" in our casual speech to mean "almost but not quite," so virtual war in the simplest definition is almost-but-not-quite war.

I want to start with one example that's very close to home, and you and your teachers may know much more about it than I do. When I was preparing this lecture, I thought about a trauma that your service has been through recently, that is to say, the attack on the USS *Cole* this autumn [October 2000]. I thought, in a curious way, it was a rather good example of one meaning of virtual war as you will experience it in your future lives as young officers. If you look at what the attack on the USS *Cole* was, it was a form of virtual war in the sense that the hostilities were undeclared and not conducted by a state party, an official naval force of another belligerent power.

The USS *Cole* was attacked by a very small boat loaded with explosives, and two men on that boat—at least two men, we don't know how many—detonated themselves and inflicted horrendous damage on a ship that I'm sure those who sailed on it were very proud of. They fought with courage and with great resourcefulness in the subsequent moments of horror and panic, but they were suddenly at war, in effect. The ship was hit. It was taking on water. People were dying. Everything about it was a war except that it was undeclared. It was not conducted by a formal belligerent party, and I had a sense that the attack on the *Cole* was in some sense your future, or one element of your future, and it deserves a great deal of reflection.

The object of this attack was to show that the mightiest and most professional and most respected Navy in the world could be hurt at a moment when its vigilance lapsed for so much as a second, and that is one face of virtual war that you need to think about, because I want to make a contrast between virtual war and real

war, and one thing about real war is that it's fought according to certain rules. The thing that was shocking about the attack on the USS *Cole* is that it systematically violated all those rules. It violated all your expectations of what war looks like.

Real war is organized violence by states, using regular uniformed personnel under a formalized chain of command, and the aim of war in those circumstances is to subjugate, repel, or defeat another state party. It observes certain formal codes that are contained in what we call international humanitarian law. It's codified, moreover, in what I mentioned a minute ago: the codes of warrior's honor. War is not chaotic behavior. It's highly ordered, rule-bound behavior, and here in the attack on the *Cole* was a form of attack on you that just blew all those rules apart.

It was disorganized violence by a non-state actor, designed to humiliate, provoke, or produce a counterproductive escalation on your part. It was a war that did not observe the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law and did not obey the codes of warrior's honor. It's a kind of war in which casualties—civilians and non-combatants—are intrinsic to the object of war. The ethical dilemma that this kind of attack poses is: How do you, as military personnel, play by the rules when the other side does not? How do you observe ethical restraint when the other side does not? How do you play fair when you have just been blindsided? I know as a civilian, my reaction when attacked with this degree of perfidy is rage and anger and cold fury and a desire to lash out at the people who have claimed your shipmates.

This is the ethical challenge that this kind of attack poses. The dilemma you face is that your opponents gain advantage by breaking the rules, by engaging in perfidy and subterfuge, but you, as a formal military force, only gain by observing the rules. A military force in a democracy can only retain its legitimacy, its self-confidence, and its public support if it plays by the rules, if it refuses to fight dirty, but all of the wars and challenges that you will face are coming at you from people who definitely and most emphatically fight dirty.

Part of American naval lore is "Remember the *Maine*," so I guess my message to you tonight is: remember the *Cole*. That's the

first thing I want to say to you. Virtual war is war that doesn't correspond to the rules that many of you have been taught.

The second definition of virtual war that I want you to focus on deals with the issue of moral risk. One of the simplest ways to distinguish virtual war from real war is that real war is made real by death, by the possibility that you will inflict death, by the possibility that you will suffer death. Thus, the side that has the greatest willingness to take and inflict casualties in real war is the side that is most likely to prevail.

Now, the emerging profile of virtual war that we're looking at, a profile made possible by the technologies that you're learning to master as young officers, is a form of warfare in which you take death and the prospect of death out of war as much as possible. Virtual war is war fought in the search for moral impunity, and let me explain what I mean by that. You're going to have people coming at you who don't play by the rules, and you're going to have people coming at you who have an infinitely greater willingness to risk anything, i.e., their lives, than you may, and that's one of the challenges you have to face. One of the emerging forms of American warfare that strikes me as a journalist and observer is this virtual war in service of moral impunity. The basic rules of this form of warfare are twofold: the zero casualty rule and the zero collateral damage rule. They're rules not in the sense that any form of violence can actually get there. There were not zero casualties in the Kosovo War. There was not zero collateral damage. It's more an asymptote than a rule, but these are the two founding premises of the kind of organized violence practiced particularly in the Kosovo War that I wanted to study in my recent book.

So it's war in the service of moral impunity, that is, war that attempts to be prosecuted without risk to your own side. The basic challenge about this kind of virtual war is that war without risk may mean violence without victory. What can you actually achieve if you set about engaging in virtual war in search of moral impunity regulated by the two constraints of zero casualties on your side and zero collateral damage on the other? How has this kind of warfare become possible? Well, some of it is a technological story, and you study it in your classrooms. It's the story of the revolution in military technology, the revolution in military affairs.

To this layman, there seem to be four principal developments. The first of them is greater precision, improvements in precision targeting and missile guidance, so weaponry is much more precise. Second, the weaponry is much more discriminate. If it's more precise, you can reduce the size of the payload. If you reduce the size of the payload, the bombs get smaller, and the spray effects are correspondingly reduced, so [the bombs are] more precise, more discriminate, and third, they can be launched from farther away as well. The Navy has become the standoff platform of choice. The distances between target and operator are increasing all the time. As those distances increase, your safety as operators increases. This is what gives you impunity when you exercise violence. You're often 1,500 kilometers away or 500 kilometers away. The final element of this is the increasing resort to unmanned platforms, UAVs, and missiles that take aviators out of the air.

You put all of that together—greater precision, more discrimination, increased distances in standoff, and pulling the operators out of the skies—and you have a new kind of warfare, the effects of which we're just beginning to understand. What interests me about this warfare is not the technology, which I don't master especially well, but the moral assumptions that drive and guide this technology. And one of the things that's very difficult to understand as a historian is whether the technology is driving an emerging culture of impunity or whether there are additional changes in American culture, which are creating the technology. Which comes first, technology or culture, in the emergence of this new culture of violence?

It can't be accidental that this technology begins to emerge after Vietnam, after a traumatic and horrifying experience of military failure and catastrophe. It can't be accidental that this technology is emerging in a culture which ends the military draft and reforms the relationship between civilian and military culture. There is something happening, it seems to me, in American culture which is much more hostile to military risk, to the infliction of death, to the prospect of you not coming back from harm's way. This is what makes the emergence of this culture a complicated story. There is new technology creating new possibilities, but the technology seems to be in the service of the new culture of risk aversion in American society, and the two are coming together in a new form of warfare.

Another factor that's extremely important in the emergence of this complex of virtual war is the emergence of television. The chief theater of modern war is now the television screen. To an astonishing degree, [in] the Kosovo War, the chief theater that a general like General Wesley Clark had to watch constantly was not merely what real damage his operators were inflicting in Kosovo and Belgrade, but the way the war was played, the way it was featured on the television screens of 19 nations. Managing that television war was absolutely essential to maintaining alliance cohesion, maintaining domestic support for the war at home.

But simultaneously, and this is another feature, the other side used television as a weapon of war. That is, the most effective anti-aircraft system that Saddam Hussein possessed during the Gulf War, the most effective anti-aircraft system that Slobodan Milosevic possessed in the Kosovo War, were the foreign TV crews. This was essentially how they were able to replay all forms of military damage back to a domestic public at home and attempt to affect domestic morale back home. For example, the fact that Saddam Hussein managed to get television cameras to the Amiriya bunker in February 1991—the bunker strike where there were several hundred fatalities—essentially ended air strikes over Baghdad. In a literal sense, the use of television as a weapon of war is the most effective weapon that your enemies have against you, and one effect is that domestic publics in the United States, in my country, Canada, and in other countries, see the effects of military violence directly. This is a factor that you can't do much about. It's one of the factors that create a culture of risk aversion. As long as military violence happened in some other neck of the woods, out of sight, out of mind, your publics could stand much higher levels of violence. When they see it on their screens, the difficulty of sustaining the political constituencies that create the will to sustain you in battle is a much more difficult political operation.

When you put all of this together—the ending of the draft, the trauma of Vietnam, the effects of television, the effects of televising military violence—you begin to get, I think, a culture which is very, very risk averse. You have domestic political leadership that is very, very hesitant about putting you in harm's way, and along comes a technology which allows military success

to be achieved at that very low risk level that seems to work politically. So culture and technology come together, in other words, in this complex I'm calling virtual war.

More needs to be said about the television thing, because it puts enormous pressure on you as young commanders. Your mistakes are much more public now than they were two or three or four generations ago. When the Marines talk about a strategic corporal, they're not just saying that corporals have an extraordinarily important job to do. They're also saying that each military person in harm's way has the capacity to have an extraordinary strategic impact if he or she gets something wrong. If there is a civilian casualty incident, if there is something that gets visibility, it can have an effect on the strategic outcome of a whole war. The concept of a strategic corporal, I think, is a way in which the Marines are thinking about the incredible visibility, the transparency, of military conflict today and the enormous pressure that puts on you particularly—young officers in harm's way. Small mistakes are more costly, because they're more transparent.

The other irony of this complex of virtual war needs to be emphasized: the more precise your weapons, the more costly your mistakes. As the weapons technology gets better and better and better, public expectations of precision rise and rise and rise. Any mistake is now judged by a higher standard than it would have been in the era before precision weapons. You have a culture out there that simply expects clean wars. You know as military officers that clean war is a contradiction in terms. The public has expectations which you systematically and in principle cannot meet, so precision has this double-edged quality which is very difficult to manage if you're in military command. The net effect of all of this, it seems to me, is to lead to a culture of military violence which is more and more risk averse.

There is one other fundamental reason why I think the calculus of risk has changed in modern societies, particularly for America. Simply, there do not appear to be absolutely vital, essential strategic interests at stake in a lot of modern conflicts. You're prepared to risk more if there is more at stake. There seems to be very little at stake in a lot of the post-war conflicts that America is

being asked to get involved in, from Haiti to Somalia to Bosnia to Kosovo. All of these seem to be environments in which it's very much open to question whether the risks that you're asked to carry are worth the candle. And so there is no compelling national interest to ratchet up the level of risk which your society is authorizing you to take.

But I think there are some things that need to be said about the world out there, and they need to be said clearly, and that is that we're living in a globalizing world in which millions, even billions, of fellow human beings are benefiting from globalization. But there are five or six spots in the world where global order is unraveling rapidly, five or six black holes around the world which are spinning out of the global order, dropping out of the global system altogether. The Balkans, Colombia, Central and West Africa, the Pakistan-Afghan border, and if you haven't heard this from your teachers, you better hear it now, Indonesia. I feel Alfred Mahan listening attentively at this moment, and he would identify Indonesia as a strategically essential archipelago astride vital sea lanes. That country is spinning apart into ethnic fragmentation and civil war.

In these zones—the Balkans, Latin America, Central and West Africa, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Indonesia—there is literally a tear in the ozone layer of globalization. Out of that tear are consequences that are very, very serious: refugee flows, narcotics, and disease. These are places with very high rates of HIV infection, huge amounts of ethnic war and massacre, terrorism, and mass killing.

In other words, what you are faced with is an overall strategic environment which has never been more favorable to the United States' interests. Because it's never been more favorable, you can't see any reason to take risks to fix it, and yet in front of your eyes as a great power, the global order is tearing in several strategic locations, and out of those tears are pouring refugees, terrorism, narcotics, disease, and sometimes the full horror of genocide itself. That's the world of the 21st century in which you are becoming young officers.

And again, the sense that this is happening in another zone very far away is wrong. The USS *Cole* was attacked by people who began training as *mujahideen* guerrillas in Afghanistan, so places that seem absolutely off your radar screen can suddenly end up being a mortal threat to the things you hold most dear. It's very hard to have a synoptic, strategic sense of the world from which these threats are coming.

Now, let me talk to you a little bit as an amateur about what can be done about this. I am trying to tell you there is no escape from the threat posed to American interests by the collapse of state order in these regions of the world. There is also no easy remedy. It seems to be manifestly absurd to urge the United States military to try and fix the crisis of state order in these places. It's a thankless and hopeless task. But it has direct implications for the Navy in at least one obvious way. When I read all the strategic projections about U.S. military force, they all start, particularly if they're written by naval personnel, with good news for the Navy. The good news for the Navy is that in a more fragmented, vulnerable world out there, forward-deployed bases are a dangerous thing for the United States to have. Forward-deployed bases are an easy target for the kind of terrorism that's coming out of these black holes in the global order.

Well, if forward-deployed bases are a bad idea, then the floating platforms of the Navy look wonderful, much safer, much less dependent on foreign alliance support. You've got a bright future. In a dangerous world, the Navy has a very bright future, partly because of this problem of sustaining forward-deployed bases. The Navy is America's most secure and most mobile platform for the projection of power overseas, and your missiles and aviators are obviously going to remain the core of American combat power. The Marines, of all the services I've looked at as a foreign civilian, seem to me to be the best placed, in terms of doctrine, strategy, and tactics, for rapid deployment in humanitarian emergencies, for evacuation of civilian personnel, and for the kind of emergency peace enforcement missions that seem to be coming up in these zones where global order and state order have fragmented. So that's the good news. As a service,

it seems to me, you're very well positioned for the world you're facing.

But the bad news is simply that it's terribly important, especially for people who have possession of the most sophisticated lethal technology in the world, it's very important always to remember to be humble about what military power can and cannot do. It's very important to remember what standoff, low-risk, high-tech military power can't do. The lesson of Kosovo is that you can't stop ethnic cleansing. You can't stop the massacre of civilians and the prevention of genocide. You can't do anything with military power alone to build nations, bind up that tear in the ozone layer, or create governments and long-term stability. The horrifying implication of the attack on the *Cole* is that in the world you're going into, you can't always be sure you can protect yourself, and you'll be blindsided by this world and by the ways in which terrorism and violence come out of these places where global order has torn and lost its coherence.

Now I want to sum up, because I've gone on slightly longer than I intended, with about five moral dilemmas that seem to come out of this general picture I've been giving you. The moral dilemmas that I see look like this. The first one is the problem of moral numbing, and it's a problem because the ethical implications of standoff weapons encourage a kind of pride in technical performance that replaces ethical reflection on the fact that you're so far away from the people you're killing, you actually forget you're killing them. This is a standard problem in military ethics. It's been a problem with aerial bombardment. It's been a problem with all forms of military violence where the violence is exerted at a great distance, but the distances at which you're inflicting lethal force are growing and growing and growing.

It's very important for those who press the buttons, who inflict death, to understand that it is death that they are inflicting. It tends to concentrate minds. It tends to make you very precise. It tends to make you observant and careful. If you convert standoff lethality into a display of technical expertise, you begin to lose the moral quality of what you're doing, and this, it seems to me, is a constant operational risk which is growing in virtual war. In virtual war, death is very, very far away, and keeping a sharp

focus on death and on the cost to those you are killing is the core of a warrior's honor. A warrior has a deep sense that what he is doing is inflicting death and terror and violence and horror on other human beings like himself. This technology can make you morally numb to the reality of what you're doing, and my submission is if you're morally numb, you're not going to be a good warrior. You're not going to do it right. You're not going to do it with the discrimination, care, and sense of responsibility you need. That's the first moral challenge.

The second moral challenge I think I alluded to in talking about the *Cole*, which is the problem of moral frustration—being tempted to vengeance, revenge, or gratuitous uses of force because your enemies don't play by the rules. It's very easy to behave in a moral fashion if a warrior faces a warrior. There's an ancient tradition of respect across battle lines where enemies respect each other as combatants. But you're facing combatants who don't play by any of those rules, and the temptations of moral frustration are very great here. The temptation to indiscriminate, vengeful uses of force instead of precision, targeted, rule-bound, ethically sustainable uses of force is very great when the other guys don't play by the rules.

The third moral temptation is what I would call the perverse consequences of doing good. This is not a civilian giving you a lecture from on high; I really do know how difficult this stuff is. The perverse consequences of doing good are that the more rule-observant, the more ethically observant your behavior is, the more likely this observance will be exploited by your enemies. This is an enduring problem in ethical behavior in warfare, but it's becoming more and more real.

In Kosovo, Milosevic understood that he was dealing with a belligerent, namely the United States chiefly, that took the Geneva Convention seriously. What does he do? He locates sensitive missile sites next to hospitals. He puts forces next to convoys of civilians. That's the game you're in. The temptation in that situation, if there are perverse consequences of being rule-observant, is to jettison the rules altogether, that is, to feel that if the rules are being exploited, then the rules are off. I just warn you against this, because the consequences of a rule violation in a

transparent media world can be extremely costly. So you have to factor into your moral calculus the clear understanding that your enemy will exploit your ethical scrupulousness and then [you must] not refrain from being scrupulous all the same.

The final two points very quickly, and then I really will stop. There are perverse consequences in risk aversion. A lot of what I have said to you about virtual war is that this is a risk-averse form of waging war. It seems to me that casualty avoidance is the Achilles heel of modern American military power. You face enemies who are prepared to die just to embarrass you. They have no hope of victory against you, but they are actually prepared to die just to make you look stupid and unprepared. This, it seems to me, is the frightening implication of the *Cole* story. Here are two young people of Islamic faith prepared to blow themselves up just so you, even for a second, look less than fully prepared. And the difficulty here is not responding to frustration, staying by the rules, not engaging in fruitless acts of vengeance, maintaining vigilance around your installations and your ships without also negating the effect of what you're trying to do, which is to show the flag. American military power is famously open. You sail into ports. You are welcomed. It's part of what you're doing. If the security imperatives override that, you cease to be effective as diplomats, and that is what you also are—diplomats for American values and American virtues overseas.

The final point will just seem like a gratuitous attack on lawyers, but I do want to make the point anyway. One of the things that I have noticed as a journalist is that there has been a legalization of ethical reasoning throughout the armed services. If you talk to someone like a senior man, much admired, even revered in the American armed services, Chuck Horner, who ran the air campaign over Iraq in 1991, he made very clear that he had all of these targets signed off by JAGs [Judge Advocate General officers, i.e., lawyers]. In 1999, none of those targets over Kosovo went through without very careful Geneva Convention review by judge advocate generals. It's clearly an excellent thing, in my judgment, that targeting is subjected to scrupulous legal review, but one of the habits of mind that it encourages is the view, and this affects you directly, that if you have legal coverage, you have

moral coverage. One of the basic things your teachers must be teaching you is that what is legal is not necessarily moral. Legal coverage is not, repeat not, moral coverage. People will sign off on targets, and the moral difficulties of doing those targets remain.

In the Kosovo case, the classic example is: Do you take out that television station in Belgrade? Half of your allies did not believe that was an acceptable target. Your aviators got legal coverage to fly, but in other words, legal coverage does not end the moral debate as to the appropriateness of certain forms of military violence. There is no way around the fact that ethics is a very uncomfortable subject in a military context. I do not want to encourage every young officer in this room to take the moral high ground into their own hands. You're a military organization. You have to work with rules and procedures. If you get the sign-off to do something, you have to execute, but do not fool yourself. The moral debate inside you is not over. A moral service and ethical service is a service in which every person takes upon themselves the moral responsibility to ask: Am I comfortable all the way down with this kind of stuff? And when we take the ethical decisions, and we hand them to someone else, we can begin a process of moral abdication. Ethical life is too important to leave to lawyers, okay?

And I guess that leads to my final summing up. Moral courage means taking personal responsibility. There is no way around it. This is the challenge to all forms of military leadership. Moral behavior is always individual behavior. The responsibilities we're talking about in ethical life are individual ones, and they have to be shouldered by each of you. Therefore, moral responsibility is a habit of the heart, and it's a habit of the mind, and I want to end on that note, because you are in a great institution whose central function is to get you to think about the incorrigibly individual character of your responsibility as serving officers and as citizens. I thank you for your attention.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Dr. Ignatieff

I'd be happy to take a question. There's been enough provocation for many questions. There is one in the front row here. Perhaps you should go to the microphone.

Question

Doctor, that was certainly a very fine lecture. My question is: How do you feel about friendly fire and collateral damage? Based on my experience in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, as hard as you try to plan your mission, and as hard as you try to have accurate weapons delivery, some friendly fire casualties and collateral damage of innocents are inevitable, so I'd just like to get a sense of how you feel on that.

Dr. Ignatieff

Well, I think I said in my lecture that one of the ironies that you have to deal with using this technology is that the technology is so seemingly precise, so seemingly clean in its effects, the public simply has no understanding that war is a story of tragedy, horror, and unintended consequence. There is no technology in the world that can eliminate the horrible, unintended consequence of collateral damage and much worse, because it's so horrifying, friendly fire. I think the difficulty that you have when you over-promote technologies, and the public tends to buy it, is that their tolerance for error goes down steadily.

In the Kosovo War, which is the best example, there was tremendous surprise that there were any collateral damage incidents whatever. The public was genuinely astonished that you could hit a bridge, release your munition, and a train comes into sight across that bridge, and seven civilians die, and everybody thought this is a terrible, unconscionable mistake. Well, some of the problem in public perception is simply that the munitions had been systematically oversold in a way that I think creates tremendous problems for military credibility. Essentially through that war and the public press conferences that NATO ran every day, they spent 78 days explaining why you had to read the fine print on the box a little more carefully, because the fine print on

the box says that at these speeds, if you're flying at 500 knots and releasing a munition, and the rule is you've got to have visual identification for a target, it's just inevitable they're going to make mistakes. So I think there is an enormous political problem with precision weaponry that isn't being faced. The public needs to be educated to understand what these things can and cannot do, because the irony is that as your precision increases, public tolerance for mistakes declines, which is a perverse and paradoxical result.

Question

Sir, what do you think about the growing use of private military corporations? These groups by definition are mercenaries. They take money for their military services, a lot of British officers and ex-U.S. Special Forces, but they also set these ethical and moral rules for themselves in governing what they're willing to be involved with. They bend the rules of war. What do you think about that, sir?

Dr. Ignatieff

That's a very good question and a difficult one to answer, because the moral perfectionist in me says I don't like mercenaries. I don't like military forces that are not under strict civilian control and that are not under control of civilians who are in turn responsible to democratic electorates. The problem with mercenaries is that you pay them, and they just write their own rules.

The difficulty with it is twofold. If I'm not a perfectionist, I then entertain another thought, which is that [these kind of forces were] pretty successful in Sierra Leone. That's the disturbing fact. These professional military guys did a pretty good job in shutting down the conflict at the stage in which they were involved. That's one problem.

The second problem, in a way an even more disturbing or difficult example, was the use in Croatia in 1993 and 1994 of a particular company that went in as a commercial venture to train the Croatian army. America as a state, as a government, could not be seen to train the Croatian government officially, above the table, so they did it by what could only be described as private

mercenaries going in there, not doing the fighting admittedly, but training the Croatian army to fight. The consequences were very dramatic. One of the reasons the Bosnian war was brought to an end was by this training of the Croatian army, linking up with the Bosnians, pushing the Serbs back, then getting American air support, and that's what drove the solution to Dayton.

So the hard fact is that when a government wants to take its fingerprints off a bit of military assistance, it goes to these private mercenary groups. As long as it's easier for governments to go to these private groups as opposed to going up above the line with official U.S. government assistance, these private mercenary outfits will continue, and I don't see any way around that problem. But the normative, the ethical problem with them is that once they're out of the bottle, they're very, very hard to control.

Question

Sir, you talked in your lecture about a tendency to engage in risk avoidance by the U.S. I know our armed forces are established, at least in large part, to prevent war so that no one will fight with us. In this new environment that you were talking about, where the enemy might even give up their lives just to embarrass us, do you think there are ways that we can proactively intimidate them so that they won't attempt these things?

Dr. Ignatieff

That's another good question. The whole issue of risk avoidance is very, very complicated. I have talked about this subject in another military academy up the Hudson River, whose name escapes me, and what I noticed talking to young officers in training there was how angry they were about all this risk-avoidance stuff, because what they were saying to me is that we have signed up for an unlimited liability contract with this republic. We are prepared to do it. We are prepared to lay our lives down in the same way our fathers and grandfathers and great-grandfathers and grandmothers did. So there is a disconnect between the willingness of your generation to engage in sacrifice and what they appear to feel is the message coming from their culture and from the political leadership. So that's one point.

And it's also clear that people forget—the whole issue of risk is complicated here. To make it still more complicated, it needs to be said that we forget that in the Gulf War, the American public was publicly prepared by the former President George Bush for casualties in the 50,000 to 60,000 to 100,000 range, and the American public said, this is an objective which we support. So the question of risk and what this public, what the American democracy, will accept in levels of risk is an open question, and it's open in the sense that it's very, very susceptible to political leadership. Great political leadership can change the calculus of risk, because great political leaders know that you're willing to do the job. That's not the issue. The question is whether the American public, your fathers and mothers, want you to do the job. But good political leadership comes out and says, "Here is the deal, guys. Here is the objective. Here is the mission. Here is how we're going to do it, and you've got to understand that here are the risks." This approach can get a tremendous reaction from the American public, and whatever criticisms I have of the former president, he did, I think, manage to show, in advance of the Gulf War, that you can create a democratic commitment to serious military risk if you do it right. So it is a matter of leadership. It's not a kind of thing set in stone in American public character that can't be changed. That's the second thing to say.

Clearly, America spends more on defense than all of its allies combined. With your military might, you are doing everything that money can do, and good training can do, and military culture can do, to overawe your enemy. I can't see what else you can do except spend some more money, and you'd probably waste it. So in direct answer to your question, you're doing everything that can be done. That is, your military spending, your military preparedness has a strong deterrent effect on anybody trying to tangle with you. But the deterrent does not work with young people of religious conviction or nationalist conviction who are prepared to die for a cause. They don't need to beat you. They just need to embarrass or humiliate you, and that's the story of the *Cole*, and it's the story of the Lebanon barracks bombing [in 1983], which was such a traumatic experience for the Marines. These are the people who cannot be deterred by whatever you spend. There is nothing you can do.

You just have to be very, very vigilant, and vigilance is a moral discipline.

When you talk about ethics, it's very important to understand vigilance as a moral act. If you're on sentry duty, you have the fate of all of your people in your hands. If you wave that truck through casually and quickly, if you survive, you will live with that for the rest of your life. Vigilance is a moral act, and it requires enormous training to get the moral reality of vigilance, those boring bits of picket duty that every serving person has to do, to understand what vigilance entails. A second's lack of vigilance can have horrendous consequences. So the only other thing you can do is just vigilance and understand vigilance as a moral duty to your fellow personnel.

Question

Sir, one topic that's come up in our ethics course is the relation between a person's personal beliefs and his or her dedication to the goals of the service. Can you please comment on the moral challenges that individuals in the services face?

Dr. Ignatieff

Ooh, big question. I think one of the things that I notice, again this is very broad brush, as a personal challenge is a sense of a growing distance between civilian and military culture.

Sometimes when I talk to American military personnel in their cups, as it were, out of uniform or something, you get a sense of, and I exaggerate slightly: Why are we defending the society exactly? You know, there is a sense of disillusion sometimes toward the civilian society and its values that military personnel feel, because certain things like duty, honor, country, to use the terms of commitment in another service, and the terms of commitment that you have, are not matters about which you are ironic or cynical.

The thing about the military service, it is the last place in America where there is simply no cynicism whatever about certain key moral terms. And you live in a society where cynicism about those terms is a constant feature of the media and popular conversation, and there is often a sense of, why do we do

this stuff? I mean, who are these people? Are they worthy of the kinds of sacrifice and time and devotion that we commit to them?

Now, this is coming from a Canadian who is not even a citizen of your country, but someone who has loved this country. I'm one of your neighbors, so I know you pretty well. It's very important to keep faith with civilian society, to understand that a democracy is a place where people are free. If people are free, they are bound to misuse their freedom. They are bound to use it in ways that appall you and you find difficult to live with as an officer devoted to certain virtues. They laugh at the things that you hold dear. But that is the nature of the freedom that you are defending. It seems to me an enormous challenge as a young officer. You have made personal choices. You could be down there in Wall Street making a bundle, or yesterday you could have been making a bundle. You could be doing other things that would be more profitable. You've made certain commitments that do reflect certain values, and those values don't appear to be shared sometimes in civilian society.

I guess all I'm saying is don't misunderstand what this country is. It's an order of freedom, and an order of freedom is a very, very hard society to defend sometimes, but if you allow this one bit of sermonizing, it's the only kind of society worth defending. Thank you very much.

Midshipman 1/C Roy

Sir, on behalf of all the midshipmen here tonight, our guests, and most definitely the ethics professors who are all here, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to come and speak to us and share your invaluable insight on these topics. I think I'd be remiss if I also didn't thank you for, in the course of your research, being willing to go into a place like the Balkans and put yourself in harm's way in the quest for knowledge that can only help out a bunch of folks that you don't know, like us. So thank you very much, sir, and on behalf of everyone, I'd like to present to you this picture of one of the places where many of us search for ethical enlightenment, the Naval Academy Chapel. Thank you very much.

